into a violin
and with her fingers
plucks the empty air
and mocks me
with the mirror of her eyes.

NANCY WALLACE

Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane. *Uphill All the Way: A Documentary History of Women in Australia.* Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1980. 335 pp. Cloth $22.95; Paper $10.95.

During my first history lesson in secondary school our teacher asked the class to give him a definition of 'history.' Confronted by a predictable silence the teacher stepped smartly to the blackboard and promptly wrote 'HISTORY = HIS STORY.' Beaming, smug, self-satisfied, he faced the class and read his definition aloud for further emphasis. Silence again prevailed. Not one of the female students even thought to question this historical apartheid, this culturally ethnocentric and simplistic view of history. History was, for the most part, written by white males who assumed that women, like Aborigines and other minority groups, played no role in Australian history, or, if they did, it was considered too slight an occurrence to warrant mentioning.

It wasn't until the mid 1970's that a serious challenge was mounted against this pervasive, male-orientated view of Australian history. Dissatisfied with traditional interpretations, a num-

ber of women began the massive task of reconstructing the history of Australian women. Recent research has resulted in the publication of many excellent historical articles in women's journals such as *Hecate* and *Refractory Girl* and in the writing of books such as Anne Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975), Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda* (1976), Beverly Kingston's *The World Moves Slowly* (1977), Ruth Teale's *Colonial Eve* (1978) and Helen Heney's *Australia's Founding Mothers* (1978). Kay Daniels' and Mary Murnane's *Uphill All the Way* contributes much to this process of reconstruction. It belongs in the same genre as *Colonial Eve* and *The World Moves Slowly* in so far as it is a collection of historical documents about Australian women rather than the presentation of a unified historical thesis.

However, *Uphill All the Way* is not devoid of historical interpretation. In the authors' own words:

> As compilers, we have not tried to remain invisible behind the documents. We have been intrusive rather than self-effacing, and the collection is structured in such a way as to express our own ideas about the position of women in Australia and the way that the study of women's history can be approached.

As well as a general introduction, each of the four sections which comprise the book is preceded by an introduction. Each document is accompanied by a short commentary. The four major sections are entitled Outcasts of Society, Private Lives, Working Women, and Women and Politics. The first three sections are divided into subgroups and each document within the subgroup is numbered. This carefully organised lay-out, together with the index at the back, makes *Uphill All The Way* a reference book which can be used with the greatest of ease. The variety and diversity of the records used by Daniels and Murnane is impressive. As well as consulting official government documents they have made use of literary texts both published and unpublished, personal letters, newspaper articles, records of legal proceedings and royal commissions, journals, interviews and written personal statements.

'Outcasts of Society' deals with "Convict Institutions, Girls' Industrial Schools and Destitute Women and Benevolence." The

'outcasts' include female convicts, "women who were destitute or were unable to support themselves and did not have the protection of a man, women who were both poor and old or infirm or insane" and "children who were neglected or criminal or thought to be in 'moral danger.' " The introduction to this section stresses the sexual and economic vulnerability of women. Failure to achieve economic independence forced women into institutions like the Female Factories at Parramatta and Launceston, Girls' Industrial Schools and other so-called charitable institutions. Conditions within the Female Factories were generally harsh and inhospitable and occasionally some of the more defiant and refractory of the female convicts rioted against factory officials. Lieutenant-Colonel Godfrey Charles Mundy, a soldier and a writer, gives a colourful description of one of the riots which took place at the Parramatta Factory in the late 1840's:

> . . . it is not many years ago that the Amazonian inmates, amounting to seven or eight hundred, and headed by a ferocious giantess . . . rose upon the guards and turnkeys, and made a desperate attempt at escape by burning the building. The officer commanding the troops then occupying the stockade . . . sent a subaltern with a hundred men, half of them armed only with sticks, and an effort was made to drive the fair insurgents within one of the yards, in order to secure them. This manoeuvre, however, failed. They laughed at the cane-carrying soldiers, refuting their *argumentum baculinum* by a furious charge upon the gates, in which one man was knocked over by a brickbat from Mrs Ajax. The military were reinforced; the magistrate made them load with ball-cartridge, and the desperadas were eventually subdued.

The Girls' Industrial Schools, set up in the late 1860's, were "designed to rescue deserted, neglected and criminal children from a life of poverty and crime." They aimed to produce well-behaved servants who could be used to alleviate the shortage of domestic labour in the colony. While some of these schools did provide children with food and shelter, it was often alleged that the treatment of girls within the schools was sometimes cruel and inhumane. Riots and escape attempts were frequent. In the following statement a Victorian police constable describes conditions at Brookside Reformatory as told to him by seven escapees:

> At the watchhouse they collectively complained of the tasks and treatment meted out to them, and stated that they had to fell, saw, and split trees, and afterwards with the aid of a horse cart the wood home, dig post-holes and erect fencing, load and cart gravel from a neighboring gravel heap . . . plough, harrow, assist in harvesting operations etc as well as to do the washing and other domestic duties.
>
> The slightest neglect or indolence on their part in performing any of those multifarious duties earns the delinquent a flogging with a heavy leather strap . . . and two of the girls had marks on their arms corroborative of the severity of a whipping which they said had been administered a few day previously.
>
> It was also stated that a 12 year old girl is now confined to her bed at the Reformatory, her hands tied, and her body covered with black and blue bruises, the result of a flogging given her by the matron, the alleged offence being that she (the girl) had torn or destroyed a portion of her clothing.

Part 2 of *Uphill All The Way* investigates the private lives of women and contains documents relating to 'Aboriginal Women, Prostitution' and 'Family and Motherhood.' The introduction to this section stresses the need to recognise "the intersection of personal experiences with public concern and with legislation." For example the personal experience of motherhood is illuminated by the inclusion of documents which illustrate the State's concern with population growth and the placing of restrictions on birth control and abortion. Prostitution is explored as "a social institution structurally linked to marriage" and the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women is seen by Daniels and Murnane as "an extreme and unbridled expression of the sexist attitudes that determined women's personal experiences." Aboriginal women were often given to white men by male Aborigines in exchange for food and tobacco. Once in the power of the white man these women were generally treated with shameless brutality.

In their discussion on prostitution the authors maintain that despite the public show of opposition to prostitution, legislators in Australian society have always recognised the benefits of allowing it to continue because of its positive relationship to marriage:

> Prostitution was regarded as upholding the married state because it ensured the virginity of girls until marriage, protected the wife from the sexual onslaughts of her husband and left her free to bear and rear children, and channelled the extra-marital sexual pursuits of the husband into casual encounters that would not threaten the stability of the family. The institution of prostitution defined not only a moral division between women but also a division between sexual and procreative labour.

When the State eventually attempted to regulate prostitution, it was due to a concern with venereal disease. Women, and in particular prostitutes, were held to be the exclusive transmitters of the disease and were subjected to regular examination and detention. Men were only involved in this exercise when their own health was at risk. In suggesting that cases of VD, both male and female, should be reported immediately, the Commissioner of Police W.A. emphasised that "the health of the troops is the paramount consideration."

In exploring the theme of motherhood Daniels and Murnane record the strong pressure applied to those women who were reluctant to have children. The decline in birthrate in the early 20th century was attributed directly to the selfishness of women who evaded motherhood. Eugenics became popular with those in power and access to contraceptive information and devices was restricted, particularly after World War I. Abortion was, of course, utterly condemned. It was the opinion of many women, however, that depressed economic circumstances, VD, infant and maternal mortality and the lack of domestic servants had more influence on the declining birthrate than did the selfishness of women. The United Associations of Women, which met in 1944, upheld the value of motherhood, but were aware of the disadvantages inherent in a large family:

> Large families mean poverty, hardship, overcrowded homes, no holidays, no rest, work for the mother from dawn till dark till dawn.

Part 3 of *Uphill All The Way* depicts the experiences of working women and is subdivided into sections entitled "Earning A Living, Domestic Servants" and "Professional Women." While most of the documents illustrate the working conditions and

economic circumstances of working class women, the problems faced by female migrant labourers and professional women such as teachers and nurses are also examined. One of the more cheerful documents tells of the success of Margaret Catchpole who managed to accumulate a number of sheep and goats while working as a private nurse. Catchpole was sentenced to transportation for stealing a horse. Her letter written to her aunt and uncle in 1806 is suggestive of a lively, independent and enterprising woman:

> '. . . i hav got foûer yowes and nine Breeding goates 3 wethers and sevenn Yong ones that is all my stock at present Mr Rouse keep them and Charg me nothing for them . . . i do not know any want Bliss God . . . i sharll i Beliv soon goo to Live By myself . . . i might a gon to Lived with maney of the saillrs that is to a Binn thear wife and might a Lived very well But i hav no inklanashun i have a pieces of ground and i am thinken to Bild a houes or Buing a Cow But the prices of a Cow is from 30 to fiftey pound a pieces that is a grat sum of money

On a more depressing note is an extract from the Journal of G.A. Robinson, written in 1830, describing the conditions of Aboriginal women who were forced to work for Bass Strait sealers in a situation which can only be described as slavery:

> . . . many attempts have been made by them to get away and several of them had lost their lives in the attempt—many have been flogged by the sealers for attempting the same . . . they are slaves. The men compel them to work hard, and they assist to work the boats in the place of men. They make them cook and do all kinds of drudgery, and they cohabit with them—the scene of debauchery is unfit to mention . . . They catch and clean mutton birds, their chief support, and they hunt for kangaroo and dress the skins.

Another iniquitous practice was the exploitation of female factory workers who were compelled to work extremely hard and long hours, often under unpleasant conditions, for a disgracefully small sum of money. The section on "Domestic Servants" is chiefly concerned with the plight of the numerous young girls who were lured from Britain (mainly Ireland) with promises of employment, high wages and good living conditions. Many of these girls arrived in Australia virtually penniless, only to discover that domestic positions were very poorly paid and

involved long hours and, in many cases, hard physical labour such as "drawing water from wells, and attending to cattle and horses." The documents relating to professional women indicate that nursing and teaching were the main avenues of professional employment for women. Teaching was (and still is) a precarious occupation for married women because in times of high unemployment they were the first ones to be "dispensed with." Women could also be dismissed from their positions because of alleged improprieties in their private lives. A female teacher was sacked because the head teacher said she was "guilty of improper conduct with a married man." The woman denied the charge and asked that the allegation be investigated, but to no avail. The Board, while unable to prove the teacher guilty, dismissed her for her "act of indiscretion" in being in "W-'s office assisting him to post up accounts without a lady friend to accompany her." Although many women entered the teaching profession very few were able to secure prestigious positions. When Julia Flynn managed, after a lengthy battle, to be appointed as Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools in Victoria in 1928, she had to face constant, unjustified hostility from her male superior:

> . . . no man appointed to a corresponding position has ever been subjected to such unusual tests during his probationary period. For six months I have been placed in this position—if I consulted the Director before reaching decisions, he would at once conclude that I was unable to cope with my work. Now he states that I failed to approach him sufficiently often, though I repeat that I know of no suggested action of mine on any important matter which I have not first submitted for his approval.

The documents in the final section "Women and Politics" relate to Aboriginal women, the feminist movement and the increasingly radical attitudes of women during the Depression. In the introduction to this section the authors see the conflict between non-party feminists, and Labor or Communist party members who were also feminists, as one of the major problems which faced the women's movement in the early 20th century. The Depression is shown to have an important influence on the political attitudes of many women, particularly those who were faced with unemployment. One of the documents records an

interview with Patricia Hurd which took place in Townsville in 1975. Pat, the daughter of political novelist Jean Devanny, describes her fight against the police during an Unemployed Women's Demonstration in 1930, when she was seventeen:

> There was a tremendous number of unemployed, single women and they were getting a very, very small dole. Some of them weren't getting any. They used any excuse for stopping single women getting the dole. You had to go through all kinds of questions. Personal things . . . The impertinence of the people behind the counter was unbelievable. . .
>
> We decided we'd have a march up to Parliament House and present a deputation to the Minister for Labour . . . We got as far as Castlereagh Street and this huge big police inspector with all his policemen standing across the roadway called upon us to stop and read us the Riot Act . . . and then asked us to desist and go home. None of us would do it . . . there was a great melee, oh a terrific fight . . .
>
> I was standing there rather dumbfounded watching all this. Suddenly something slapped me on the wrist . . . It was a handcuff. And as I was walking out with this policeman, this one slapped something on it. It was another handcuff . . . when I pulled the handcuffs they said, "Oi, you're resisting arrest. That's another charge." Then they . . . dragged me through the streets of Sydney. And I got indignant . . . so I started to punch one of the blokes and hit him with the handcuffs. He said, "That's assaulting the police. That's another charge." I'm only 5 foot 2 and he's this great big policeman.

Uphill All The Way is a well-presented, rich and fascinating collection of documents, a book which seeks out those who have been "Hidden from History." It will be read with great interest by anyone concerned with the position of women in Australia today.